

THE DISTORTION OF REALITY THROUGH MADNESS  
IN GEORG BÜCHNER'S LENZ AND WOYZECK

by

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## Introduction

As scholarship on Georg Büchner continues to increase in both number and scope, the significance of his monumental literary contributions becomes overwhelmingly evident. Though his twenty-three year old life was tragically ended by an undiagnosed (but probably typhus) infection, Büchner's few but precursory realistic works not only heavily influenced literary movements and their representatives ranging from Hauptmann to Brecht, but will undoubtedly influence future trends as well.

Georg Büchner was born in the village of Goddelau near Darmstadt on October 17, 1813, the oldest of six children.<sup>1</sup> From early childhood Georg came under the strong influence of his father, Dr. Ernst Büchner, whose professional career had begun as a field surgeon first in the Dutch Army and then in Napoleon's Old Guard. Georg's father, who had graduated as a medical doctor at Giessen, was awarded the prestigious position of chief medical councilor in Darmstadt and took up a highly successful general practice there when Georg was three years old. The energy and discipline of the father's character seemed to be those of a self-made man who subordinated all his interests to the attainment of professional success. Dr. Büchner soon decided that Georg should follow his path to the medical arts. The boy did indeed possess a naturally inquiring mind of a strongly scientific inclination; but though he enrolled in medical studies at Strasbourg in November, 1831, it is also known that Georg experienced unhappy conflict with his father.

Georg's loving, sensitive mother, born into an upper middle-class family of civil servants, was in several ways the opposite of Georg's father; whereas he was a positivist and an atheist, she was deeply Christian, undogmatic, and quietly secure in her faith. Although unable to withstand her husband's dominant personality, she was able to give her son some support in his conflict with his father. It was she who stimulated the imaginations of their children and taught them to love nature and poetry. Young Georg Büchner first heard the fairy tales and folk songs he never ceased to love from his mother, who also introduced him to the poetry of Schiller, Körner, and von Matthisson and to the prose of Jean Paul. The father conflict, love for nature, fascination with fairy tales and folk songs, and puzzlement over religious values were not only strong influences on his life, but also manifested themselves as essential elements in the two works which this study will treat, Lenz and Woyzeck.

Some of Büchner's siblings were better known than he throughout the greater part of the nineteenth century. His brother Ludwig wrote a popular and influential book on philosophical materialism, Kraft und Stoff; Luise was one of the most successful women writers of the time and an early champion of the feminist movement; Wilhelm, a pharmacist and chemist, perfected a method for producing artificial ultramarine and became wealthy as the owner of a dye factory; another brother, Alexander, became a respected professor of literature at a French university. But despite similar interests and noteworthy contributions in pursuits related to those of their older brother, none of Büchner's siblings had any idea of his true accomplishments.

Just prior to his matriculation as a medical student at Strasbourg,

Büchner graduated from the Darmstädter Gymnasium with a final essay defending Cato's suicide; in fact, in each of his three major essays at the gymnasium Büchner chose to write on suicide, which he considered an affirmation of the existence of free will. From some descriptions given by school friends, Büchner is depicted as entirely independent in thought and action through his striving for substantiality and truth, boldly skeptical toward religion yet tolerant of the ideas and beliefs of others, and guided in his taste for literature by his love for truth and authenticity; among his favorites were Shakespeare, Homer, Goethe (his favorite work of German literature was Faust), Aeschylus and Sophocles, followed by Jean Paul and the major romantics.

While at Strasbourg, Büchner became an eager, receptive student and also took the opportunity (denied him in his homeland with its stiff political restrictions and censorship) to vent his youthful enthusiasm at an occasional political rally or march. There is a kernel of truth in the misleading statement that Georg Büchner was a revolutionary without a revolution; but Büchner was intellectually astute enough to realize that a "revolution from above" could never work (he thus rejected the philosophy of the "Young Germans"), because of the impossible task of overcoming the rift between the educated and uneducated. This same realization soon befell many young, idealistic Russian intellectuals who were trying to win over the peasants. It is one of the intents of this study to show that Büchner, perhaps sometimes disillusioned but with a keen awareness of the reality of his time, did not write a work such as Woyzeck as a call to arms, but rather succeeded, to a degree of realistic portrayal never before attained, in depicting the plight, suffering and essence of man in an extreme condition.

Owing to a Hessian law that placed a two-year limit on length of study permitted on foreign soil, Büchner returned to Giessen to continue his studies. While at Strasbourg he had become engaged to Minna, the daughter of his landlord, Pastor J. J. Jaeglé, but at his own insistence the engagement was kept a secret. His letters to Minna and to others shed light on Büchner's true thoughts and concerns in a given period. It is clear, for example, that Büchner discovered that man is a puppet, controlled by his inescapable nature and by forces which he does not and cannot control. Despite this disillusionary discovery, Büchner proceeded to write The Hessian Courier in the early spring of 1834 which aimed to inform the public of unjust and inhumanitarian practices by the aristocracy, but which did not reach most peasants, who were frightened of possible punitive action for merely possessing a copy of this pamphlet.

In January of 1835 the twenty-one year old Büchner began writing his first play, Dantons Tod. In less than five weeks he completed it and sent it to Karl Gutzkow, editor of the literary section of the periodical The Phoenix, who heeded Büchner's plea for quick approval (and money for his flight to France--a warrant for Büchner's arrest was later issued). On March 9, 1835 Büchner fled to Strasbourg through the financial help of his mother and brother Wilhelm. At Strasbourg--this time as a refugee and without a passport--he began reading comparative anatomy and philosophy, resolved to make university teaching his career, and he concentrated, against his father's wishes for an emphasis on general practice, on the theoretical foundations of the medical sciences.

Büchner spent the summer of 1835 translating Victor Hugo's Lucretia Borgia and Maria Stuart. As early as May 12, Gutzkow refers to Büchner's intention of writing a novella about J. M. R. Lenz. Büchner had looked

forward to contributing on a limited basis (so that his studies would not suffer) to a new periodical, The German Review (Die deutsche Revue), edited by Gutzkow and Ludolf Wienbarg. Although Büchner, in October, 1835, identified an essay on Lenz as a planned piece for contribution, the journal was banned before its first issue.

In the winter semester 1835-36 Büchner turned to dissecting and experimenting. His only comedy, Leonce und Lena, was written for a contest (but belatedly entered) sponsored by the Cotta publishers of Weimar in the early summer of 1836. In October, after a visit from his mother and sister, he left Strasbourg for Zürich, where he received the Doctorate of Philosophy; he was appointed Privatdozent at Zürich University and inaugurated his course on the comparative anatomy of fishes and amphibia with a lecture on their cranial nerves. Later that year he wrote Woyzeck, which he reworked; Büchner had written in September that his literary works could not be finished at a definite time like the tailor with his garment. Büchner made excessive demands upon himself. His pace did not slacken in Zürich, but rather drove him to exhaustion as he worked with his scalpel by day and read and wrote by night. He died after an illness lasting seventeen days on February 19, 1837.

It is the intent of this study to examine the ways in which reality has been distorted through madness in Büchner's Lenz and Woyzeck. Both these works depict irrationality resulting from extreme human conditions. The form, frequency, and intensity of madness sharply differs in the two works: In Lenz, where madness is a major factor throughout the novella, all three elements (form, frequency, intensity) have been represented on two pages of charts in accordance with the objective goal (but admittedly with subjective interpretation) of graphically plotting the mental aber-



rations of the protagonist. Woyzeck does not contain the constant, sustained vacillations of mental disturbance, but represents no lesser degree of irrational intensity through the act of murder. This study also readily concedes the problematic concerns inherent in any work which attempts to define or evaluate reality. This is particularly true in the case of Lenz (which certainly explains its greater emphasis) with as many as four different levels of reality--that of Lenz, all other characters (taken collectively, which is a necessary fiction in itself!), the narrator/Büchner, and the reader/interpreter.

## Lenz

The importance of Georg Büchner's Lenz to German literature can be measured in part by the numerous and extreme accolades accorded it by prominent literary critics of Germanistik. More than one scholar has compared Büchner's talent to that of the great Goethe.<sup>2</sup> The major factors for such favorable comparisons have been and continue to be Büchner's realistic portrayal of his main character Lenz in an extreme human condition, or Grenzsituation, and the early appearance of Lenz on the nineteenth-century German literary scene, which was at the time still replete with the vestiges of the idealism against which Büchner so strongly reacted. Lenz's momentous impact resulted in its precursory role for later naturalism and existentialism.

It may be reasonably assumed that Büchner's scientific background and gifts of observation, analysis, and perceptiveness served as a catalyst for a strong realistic tendency which impelled him in both Lenz and Woyzeck to base his work on historical documents. Furthermore, it is logical to assume that Büchner, with his emphasis on empiricism, was bound to be attracted by a case such as that of Jacob Michael Reinhold Lenz, who at the very least must have intensely aroused Büchner's scientific curiosity. Not only was J. M. R. Lenz's vacillating behavior (if not condition of mental aberrations) cause for Büchner's interest, but his poetic skill could not have escaped the attention of young Büchner, who had shown an early penchant for creative literature himself.

In choosing J. M. R. Lenz as his historical model, Büchner most certainly could have found a worse subject. According to Ronald Hauser, the contributions of this lyric poet and dramatist of the Storm and Stress period "must be considered second only to Goethe's."<sup>3</sup> Yet between the dual lures of literary merit and scientific interest, it was probably the scientific appeal which was stronger for Büchner. Hauser writes:

Danton, after all, proves Büchner's fascination with all matters pertaining to the mind and its functions, including the question of insanity. The scientific research which led to the writing of the two treatises, 'On the Nervous System of the Barbel,' and 'On the Cranial Nerves' shows that Büchner's interest in the nervous system was neither casual nor purely speculative. In fact, it would hardly be an exaggeration to recognize a driving preoccupation here. Büchner's professional interests, both as a writer and as a scientist, quite naturally converged upon the figure of Lenz. [p. 49]

Büchner's scientific curiosity, already apparent in Dantons Tod, is elevated by Hauser even to the status of compulsion.

The exact dates during which Büchner wrote his only piece of narrative prose are not known, but the probable period of its composition was November-December, 1835. In October of that year Büchner, still on his first stay in Strasbourg, wrote his parents about his intention to write an article on Lenz for Die deutsche Revue. Büchner's initial interest in J. M. R. Lenz may have coincided with the first appearance of the latter's collected works in 1828, edited by Tieck. In any case, Maurice Benn notes a quotation from Lenz's poem about Friederike Brion, "Die Liebe auf dem Land", in Büchner's letter to his fiancée Minna Jaeglé of March, 1834, and adds: "The depth and persistence of Friederike's love for her faithless lover Goethe, so admirably expressed in these lines, explains the jealousy which Büchner ascribes to Lenz in the Novelle and

which is such an important motif in it."<sup>4</sup> Although both August Stöber (Büchner's friend) and Ludwig Büchner (younger brother) referred to the novella as a fragment, virtually all Büchner scholars consider it complete. Büchner's Lenz was first published by Karl Gutzkow in 1839 for the Telegraph für Deutschland.

The themes of madness and social isolation are recurrent in all of Büchner's works. Roy Cowen defines Büchner's realistic treatment of these themes by contrasting them to other literary works of that time: "In contrast to idealistic drama, Büchner's works preclude any escape from the physicality of conscience into a spiritual realm. The only way in which his characters can eliminate the pain of conscience is by insanity or by a rejection of individuality through association with social or religious values."<sup>5</sup> That part of Lenz which best represents this contrast to idealism and at the same time reflects Büchner's concern about the idealistic distortion of reality is, of course, the Kunstgespräch. John Parker's remark on Büchner's intent in the Kunstgespräch could not possibly be more apropos to the main thrust of this study: "In his attack on idealism Büchner is concerned with the idealistic distortion of reality and the idealistic blindness to reality."<sup>6</sup>

Unlike many works, it is not the intent of this study to concern itself either with the accuracy of the historical documents themselves or with Büchner's adherence to the same. The sole exception to this lack of emphasis on a historical-documentary basis will be those matters which might shed light on the distortion of reality through madness in Büchner's characters. As portrayed by Büchner, Woyzeck's madness, which culminates in a single main act of crime, is much easier to comprehend than that of the more complex character Lenz. A diagnosis of Lenz's

insanity would therefore seem in order as a starting point.

#### A. A Diagnosis of Lenz's Illness

Recently there appeared a book in which the author, William Reeve, claims that through the character Lenz, Büchner succeeded in giving an objective perspective with depictions in almost clinical detail of the psychological symptoms of a form of schizophrenia.<sup>7</sup> In praising Büchner's near-clinical details, Reeve was completely correct. Büchner's scientific background obviously aided in his realistic portrayal of Lenz's madness, but the combination of this background with the author's narrative technique, through which Lenz's inner thoughts are extensively revealed to the reader, produces an amazingly effective account.

Lenz's dreams may signify a guilt complex. He imagines his mother with roses, and he speaks of a certain girl, perhaps a former girl friend who did not return his love. The reader does not know whether Lenz in fact killed these women or not; it is never made quite clear and could be real or his delusion. In any event Lenz seems to believe that he could not help his mother or the girl, and that he somehow destroyed them. In such cases as these it is possible that Lenz experiences guilt because of his own anger, which he has directed against these two women, and therefore he punishes himself. He may suffer delusions of sin and guilt, all of which could culminate in the mistaken belief--whether or not based on reality--that he has committed some unforgivable sin beyond even God's mercy. This would explain why he feels so close to Oberlin, who for Lenz not only plays a father role, but also offers one possible path to religious understanding.

The father-son, or here the father-child relationship, is quite

important in this work. One need only note the many characteristics of Lenz's childlike qualities ("die blonden Locken";<sup>8</sup> "das anmutige Kindergesicht Lenzens" [p. 82]; "wie der Jammer eines Kindes" [p. 99]) and his preoccupation with children (e.g., the dead girl); these references allude to a confused childhood. When Kaufmann explains to Lenz that Lenz's father wants his son back home, Lenz refuses, saying: "Hier weg, weg! nach Haus? Toll werden dort?" [p. 88]. Lenz has substituted Oberlin for his father. It becomes quite evident that Lenz possesses an extremely negative attitude toward his father.

The second reason Lenz feels close to Oberlin stems from Lenz's mixed views on religion. Lenz undoubtedly has strong religious feelings, but they are ambivalent (during church service, "ein stßses Gefühl unendlichen Wohls" [p. 84] overcomes him, yet he goes to the mountains and curses God). Although he seeks God, he bears intense ill will against the Almighty; this extremely negative attitude possibly results from his father, since God is also a father-image.

Because of his deep depression Lenz suffers nihilistic illusions, which underscore such expressions as "er war im Leeren" [p. 80]; "er rührte Alles in sich auf; aber todt! todt!" [p. 93]; "es war aber eine entsetzliche Leere in ihm..." [p. 101]. Lenz's severe depression exceeds grief--that is the nihilistic element. He suffers pain (jumps into the water, injures himself) just to know that he is alive. Pain, then, becomes a confirmation of life in the physical sense of the word and a means to overcome his anxiety.

It seems that Lenz is on a course toward suicide (or he believes he is on this course--from the text one cannot be certain). Intense anxiety explains the probable cause for his jump into the cold water--to get sick

and possibly die. At the end of the story when something bursts out in the courtyard, the reader assumes that Lenz has died. Indeed, "Die Kindsmaid kam todtblass und ganz zitternd..." [p. 100]--the nurse heard the thump and thought he had died.

Concerning Lenz and suicide it should also be noted that Büchner has not employed any lesser stylistic device here to heighten suspense. Lenz wants to kill himself because he feels worthless. Reality has become so distorted for him that he believes he deserves to die because he has done something terrible. The many child references constitute a definite sign that Lenz's childhood or early years are having an effect on him. For his part there exists an ambivalence toward dying--he wants to die, yet also to live. Lenz tries to bring the child back to life, for if he could resurrect her, such power might also revive himself. As part of his religious ambivalence, Lenz fears what God will do to him if he does commit suicide, and this is also in part what keeps him alive. One further note on conflicting elements: There is much in this work which reflects good against evil--God as good or evil (punitive); good father (Oberlin) versus evil father (Lenz's own father); life against death; art as beautiful (positive) or not. Without question, Lenz, and perhaps Büchner, had considerable doubt over what is good or evil.

In concluding the diagnosis, it should be stressed that Lenz suffers extreme remorse and guilt over something he either did in the past or believes that he did. Even if he did nothing wrong, it is still likely that he condemns himself for having feelings of anger. He talks about murder, speaks of his mother dying, blasphemes God, becomes very agitated over his father (very symbolic), and begins to realize that Oberlin cannot help him. All these characteristic pieces fit together and indicate an

obvious anger, and it is this anger which compels him to feel guilt. Through the excellent portrayal of Lenz's inner thought processes B chner unquestionably can be considered a forerunner of the later psychological novels of Dostoevsky and Kafka.

#### B. The Portrayal of Psychological Reality in Lenz

Through careful observation of actions and dialogue one may approach Lenz and its main character from the viewpoint of modern clinical psychology. Indeed, this approach is one important aspect of numerous considerations concerning Lenz, and has just been treated in the above diagnosis. But it must be emphasized that Lenz is much more a literary masterpiece than a clinical study. Even those clinical aspects received so enthusiastically by psychologists owe their substance to B chner's splendid imagery and style. As Ludwig B ttner has put it: "Ohne die Erhebung in das dichterische Bild w re Lenz eine heute l ngst vergessene Krankheitsgeschichte geblieben. Das Leiden und Zerbrechen von Lenz ruft Schrecken und Erbarmen hervor wie kaum eine andere Gestalt in der deutschen Prosakunst. Das Kunstwerk selbst, seine  sthetische Form und stilistische Ausdruckskraft, kann medizinisch nicht erfasst und interpretiert werden."<sup>9</sup>

The reflection of Lenz's madness through B chner's distortion of reality is evident from the very first scene, which sets the mood for the novella by depicting Lenz's isolation as he wanders through the mountains. It is, of course, Lenz's conception of reality which is distorted; yet at the same time his aberrant actions are at least partially provoked by the indifference of nature and the incoherence between Lenz and his fellow man. The theme of isolation occurs often among B chner's protagonists, but only in Lenz does a character experience such complete delusion through



abandonment by nature, man, and God: nature is "nasskalt" [p. 79] for Lenz; his attempts to express himself effectively and to receive true understanding from Oberlin are unsuccessful; and his efforts in the direction of religious salvation come to naught in the face of an uncaring, remote God. Concerning this latter point, it is as if the first scene reflects, at least symbolically, Lenz's futile reaching for God (he is closer to Him in the mountains).

Cold, dampness, storms, and powerful thunder all confront Lenz, who had at first been unconcerned and unfatigued. Yet this first glimpse of Lenz that B chner gives us is more than just a microcosm of man versus nature. Stylistically through verb repetition ("Anfangs dr ngte es ihm in der Brust, wenn das Gestein so wegsprang..."; "es dr ngte in ihm..." [both p. 79]) and adjective exaggeration to produce heightened effect ("T nen...in ihrem wilden Jubel"; "der Sonnenschein... und sein blitzendes Schwert"; "ein helles, blendendes Licht" [all p. 79]) B chner portrays Lenz as one who reacts totally and instinctively according to his perception of nature. This enormous expanse of landscape diminishes Lenz beyond the point of isolation, and he becomes so completely absorbed that his reactions are almost subconscious ("er wusste von nichts mehr" [p. 80]).

Lenz felt gripped by a nameless fear and believed he was in a terrible void just before it seemed to him that he was being followed by something horrible, which the narrator portentously characterizes "...als jage der Wahnsinn auf Rossen hinter ihm" [p. 80]. Walter Hinck, who treats the natural background in Lenz from a more integrated point of view and with greater insight than that of several other critics, suggests that the framed setting helps depict the abnormal figure of Lenz

as true.<sup>10</sup> That is, there are enormous rifts in the world, and in Lenz Büchner shows not only the rift between Lenz and other people, but between man and nature, which conquers man's reality. Just as Dostoevsky's character Raskol'nikov<sup>11</sup> in Crime and Punishment undergoes relentless mental anguish, so does Lenz suffer intolerable mental stress to the point of committing bizarre actions comprehensible only to his own inner reality. Yet Raskol'nikov with full mental faculties is tormented by the guilt of his physical crime, murder. Lenz (but not Woyzeck, who will be treated later!), in his irrationality, commits no physical crime; but to the contrary later in the novella he attempts futilely the reverse, positive feat: the resurrection of the dead girl.

Lenz's attempt to resurrect the child illustrates the religious aspect (discussed in more detail below) of Lenz's irrational thinking, but at this point a non-religious, non-clinical approach concerning his madness might seem in order. While investigating the various examples and implications of Lenz's madness may lead one to conclude that there are different levels of reality, each stemming from its own set of causal relationships, a few scholars attempt to downgrade Lenz's insanity to "mental disturbances" or "reactions" to socio-political pressures. False assumptions, from which only false deductions may follow despite some logical grains of truth used in discussion, should be avoided.<sup>12</sup> A good example of this type of misguided approach is Janet King's article, in which the author states:

I suggest that Büchner does not view Lenz's condition as hermetic. Rather, the author is presenting social conditions in a causal relationship to Lenz's aberrant behavior. Büchner has reconstructed the externally imposed pressures and constraints to which Lenz was subjected and depicted his mental disturbance as a reaction to boundaries imposed by social pressures.

I propose that the strongest indications in support of this thesis are to be found in the structure of the novella when this structure is compared to biographical data concerning Lenz and Büchner's source, Oberlins Aufzeichnungen.<sup>13</sup>

Even though King seems to grant some elasticity when she writes that Büchner found it fruitful to contrast and probe the relationship between fact, reported fact, and his own perceptions about Lenz's situation, her statements such as "...the historical Lenz who left Steintal was not in the final stages of a permanent mental illness," "Lenz apparently regained his mental equilibrium, returned to his home in the Baltic, and resumed what the society of that day considered a normal, responsive existence," and "...while Lenz's conduct heretofore had been considered outré and bizarre, embarrassing for Goethe and others at the Weimar court, he had not been judged insane in the absolute sense of total lack of contact with reality" belie the over-emphasis which she places on a strong fidelity by Büchner to historical sources.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, German literature includes many works with a definitive historical basis--Büchner's own Dantons Tod, to cite only one of numerous examples. Such works continue to be the object of the most detailed historical literary tests which critics have ever devised. Yet art may speak for itself and stand apart from historical and moral judgments. J. M. R. Lenz may well have been a sane, albeit bizarre individual, but that says nothing about Büchner's Lenz and the way Büchner portrayed him.

Passages which illustrate Lenz's distorted reality caused by madness permeate the novella, are largely self-evident, and require no enumeration. Their derivation, inter-relationship, and function, however, constitute the essence of Büchner's work and make it the literary

masterpiece that it is. If one observes and carefully considers the vacillations of Lenz's rationality, which occur with a certain degree of predictability (discussed in more detail below), there is one significant passage which any serious study of Büchner's Lenz could not possibly underestimate--the so-called Kunstgespräch, or Lenz's erudite discussion with Kaufmann on art.

### C. The Discussion of Art

A great many articles have been written on the function of the Kunstgespräch, which occurs about half-way through the work. The term "half-way" is used only to define placement; Benno von Wiese contends that the Kunstgespräch marks the middle of the novella, but Erna Neuse and Peter Jansen (Kunstgespräch occurs "just before the middle") believe that Oberlin's departure for Switzerland marks that position.<sup>15</sup> Jansen, who calls the discussion on art "an island of sanity in a sea of madness," places great emphasis on the structural function of the conversation: "Tacitly or indeed overtly such an approach [considering the Kunstgespräch solely in terms of its content, neglecting the structural function of the passage] to a pivotal part of the work presupposes a serious compositional flaw in Büchner's narrative, since it either ignores or denies the author's concern with the structural congruity and his success in achieving it."<sup>16</sup>

Jansen's study merits substantial consideration, if only because he is one of very few who do not view the Kunstgespräch solely or even mainly as a vehicle to convey Büchner's own opinion on art. According to Jansen, the opinion that Büchner deviated from historical events in order to espouse his own views is so widespread that "it has generally been overlooked how carefully Büchner prepares for the insertion of the Kunstgespräch,

taking great pains to relate it to the protagonist's experience and thus to imbed it firmly in the narrative context. Indeed, some of the changes from the source in other parts of the work seem to serve no other purpose."<sup>17</sup>

There exist then two camps of critics, one set claiming the Kunstgespräch is a three-legged chicken which, largely owing to Lenz's lucid pronouncements, cannot possibly be justified in terms of the rest of the novella; the other camp views the discussion as a peacock--quite an elegant, grand fowl, but still a bird. Valid points may be made for both sides. Ronald Hauser writes that Lenz's attack on idealism in literature does not really merit thematic support in terms of the main idea of Lenz (a young man's battle against madness)<sup>18</sup> and correctly adds that previous context demonstrates Büchner's actual de-emphasis in the realm of ideas. But assuming that the character Lenz possessed from the very beginning of the novella the same innate views and the potential to express them, is it not also plausible that simply a) no peaceful state of mind and b) no opportunity to espouse his views on art really occurred before the Kunstgespräch?

Another critic, while underscoring the non-compliance of the Kunstgespräch to the historical Oberlin's diary, nevertheless cites some similarity between Büchner's protagonist and J. M. R. Lenz. Yet Walter Hinck cautiously adds:

Die Übereinstimmungen sollten aber den unterschiedlichen historischen Ort beider Dichter nicht vergessen machen. Lenz entwirft seine Theorie gegen den Klassizismus Gottscheds und gegen die - von Lessing gerade neu kanonisierte - aristotelische Dramenpoetik. Die grosse Literaturepoche, die Lenz mit heraufführen half, vergass sein Programm wieder. Büchner steht jenseits dieser Epoche und fasst seine Ästhetik als einen Gegenentwurf gegen die des klassisch-romantischen „Idealismus“ auf.<sup>19</sup>

To resolve the question of whether the Kunstgespräch blends with the rest of the novella or is merely a unique passage inserted for Büchner's philosophy on art, a brief review of the work before the Kunstgespräch in terms of Lenz's discussions, references, or even thoughts on art is necessary. Analyzing the work in this way, one is justified in considering the object of observation an accomplished, successful writer, a status which is granted Lenz even before the Kunstgespräch. When Lenz first meets Oberlin, the latter knows of his name and has already read some of his plays.

Just before the Kunstgespräch Lenz speaks to Oberlin about life and soul for every form in nature--rocks, metals, water, plants, etc., the higher forms with more organs being better able to choose, to express, to understand, and therefore being more deeply affected. Lower forms in nature would enjoy a greater degree of tranquility [p. 85]. By his own definition, Lenz, not only a higher form (man) but also a sensitive poet, is certainly one who can be so deeply affected. As is evident in the opening mountain scene, a poet in such magnificent surroundings should be overwhelmed by nature's splendor. But the joy of nature's beauty is juxtaposed with the awesome power and harsh reality of nature's indifference to man, the dionysian side of nature which shakes the susceptible Lenz to his foundations and intensifies his realization of man's isolation and impotence. The inversion produced by Lenz's distorted reality here also shows the great extent to which man may suffer, a theme common to other works by Büchner.

The third-person narrative technique allows the reader to experience the extreme sensitivity of Lenz's mind. But if, in comparing formats similar to that of the Kunstgespräch, one should choose to discriminate

and ignore such things as poetic sensitivity, there are still a few instances in which Lenz either concerns himself with the arts or displays a learned demeanor: To counter an increasing feeling of anxiety and numbness brought on by darkness Lenz recites Shakespeare to make his blood flow faster [p. 82]; he reveals himself as a student of theology and asks Oberlin's permission to give a sermon [p. 84]; in his conversation on higher and lower forms Lenz was clearly able to demonstrate his intellectual superiority over Oberlin, who put an end to it (Lenz's line of thought) because it led him (Oberlin) too far from his simple ideas; then Lenz took Oberlin's theory on color representation for human beings and developed it even further [p. 86].

Those critics who would view the Kunstgespräch as an integral but not integrated part of the novella largely do so on the basis of thematic disharmony. Yet the diversity of human experience, the portrayal of which makes Büchner a true forerunner of later realists, would seem to challenge this view. Nor does the comparatively higher level of vocabulary employed by Lenz in the Kunstgespräch necessarily deserve more than the attention accorded a stylistic examination.<sup>20</sup> Büchner knew that a discussion on literature and art necessitated a more sophisticated dialogue, and he responded accordingly. Had similar discussions occurred earlier in the novella, Büchner most certainly would have supported such passages with appropriate linguistic means. Strongly supportive of the view that the Kunstgespräch integrates well with the other parts of Lenz is John Parker, who writes:

It is the generally accepted view that in this conversation on art Büchner expresses his own opinions. Yet one does not feel that this discussion is merely inserted for this purpose, and it forms in fact an organic part of the Novelle because there are certain analogies between the idealism and realism of the Kunstgespräch and the rest of the story.<sup>21</sup>

While this study is not a philosophical treatise and the function of the Kunstgespräch has been the object in question, Erwin Kobel reminds those concerned with Büchner scholarship that one should always keep in mind Büchner's penchant for philosophy; Kobel notes that in the fall of 1836, a month and a half before Büchner's emigration to Zürich, the author of Lenz had intended to begin his university profession with lectures on the philosophical systems of the Germans since Cartesius and Spinoza. Kobel stresses that one must therefore take Büchner's preoccupation with philosophical thought quite seriously, and that the philosophical element in his writing might reflect thoughts in human expressions which he himself missed in philosophy.<sup>22</sup> Hans Mayer characterizes Büchner's views on art as no less than a new landmark on the stage of German aesthetics and literary theory:

Büchners ästhetische Konzeption (und hier unterscheidet sie sich in nichts von anderen Bereichen seines Denkens und Wirkens) ist in doppelter Weise bedeutsam. Sie bedeutet Weiterentwicklung oder eigentlich Abkehr, soweit die künstlerischen Vorlieben und Glaubenssätze der ersten Jugend und des Elternhauses in Frage stehen; gleichzeitig aber ist hier eine neue Etappe in der Geschichte der deutschen Ästhetik und deutscher Bemühungen um eine Theorie der Literatur eingeleitet. Darüber hinaus bedeutet Büchners Kunstlehre - gerade weil sie einen neuen historischen Abschnitt deutscher Geistes- und Kunstgeschichte kennzeichnet - einen wichtigen Anhaltspunkt zum Verständnis der geistigen und gesellschaftlichen Problematik ihrer Zeit.<sup>23</sup>

In his well-written assessment Mayer therefore accords Büchner's novella the great literary significance which it is due and which others often fail to credit.

Before concluding discussion on the Kunstgespräch, it should also be noted that not only does Lenz appear saner during his debate with Kaufmann than anywhere else in the novella, but many positive characteristics often



beyond those of average and rational men are found in his display of knowledge and assertiveness. Dieter Sevin writes:

Während des Kunstgespräches kann sich Lenzens reger Intellekt auf etwas ausserhalb seiner selbst konzentrieren. Er fühlt sich engagiert, seine sonst oft bemerkbare Gleichgültigkeit ist aufgehoben, und er spricht wie er in der ganzen Novelle noch nicht gesprochen hat: selbstbewusst, überzeugt und autoritativ. Man merkt es ihm an, dass seine ganze Persönlichkeit, sein innerstes Wesen beschäftigt und erfüllt ist. Er ist in der Lage, sich wieder als literarische Autorität zu sehen und sich mit seinem eigenen Werken zu identifizieren...<sup>24</sup>

Besides merely conveying some commendable attributes of Lenz, Sevin's comments reflect a very positive norm against which the intensity of Lenz's subsequent contrasting state of mental disintegration may be measured.

#### D. Religion and Oberlin

Among the many, often differing, interpretations and scholarly works on Lenz there is a common element which is found in nearly every study: the treatment, whether emphasized or not, of the religious motif. This motif affects virtually all other facets of the novella--main characters and their interrelationships, nature, consciousness, suffering, fear, and certainly reality and madness. The gradual but intensifying destruction of Lenz's religious belief (and there can be no doubt that he did believe) bears witness to the erosion of the principal stabilizing force in Lenz's life.

From the very outset of the novella Lenz's religious beliefs are deep and innate, and it is his utter dependence on them and subsequent disillusionment through the failure of such beliefs to sustain him which ultimately bring about his downfall. Although Büchner, strictly speaking, does not tie Lenz to any specific religious thoughts in the opening scene, it later

becomes clear that Lenz has perceived nature as created by God. Moreover, there are several religious allusions, some of which have a pantheistic ring, even in the descriptions of Lenz's early thoughts: "...wie ein Wiegenlied und Glockenläute..."; "...er wühlte sich in das All hinein, es war eine Lust, die ihm wehe that..." [p. 79]; "Es war finster geworden, Himmel und Erde verschmolzen in eins." [p. 80].

On the purely negative side and therefore just as significant from the viewpoint of marking those instances which portend Lenz's worsening mental condition through the novella, Büchner introduces a dark and much feared subterranean element (also occurring in Woyzeck) which in Lenz may also take the alternate symbolic form of a plunge or downward motion: "...tief unten aus den Schluchten..." [p. 79]; "...die Erde wich unter ihm..."; "...in einen brausenden Strom, der seine klare Flut unter ihm zog..."; "...von wo man wieder hinabstieg..."; "...tönte wie Donner unter ihm, er musste sich niedersetzen..."; "Er riss sich auf und flog den Abhang hinunter." [all p. 80]. Lenz, feeling as if something horrible would overtake him and as if madness were chasing behind him, at last is relieved by lights and the sound of voices. From the evidence of several passages, a case could be made for Büchner's use of light symbolism as positive relief (some comments on Büchner's style are found below). From the frightening mountain experience Lenz finds brief repose in the acquaintance of Pastor Oberlin, undoubtedly the human embodiment of Lenz's hopes for religious reconciliation and with it rational and peaceful accommodation. But the original peace that Lenz found with Oberlin soon dissolves upon the re-emergence of dark, compelling forces.

For Lenz Oberlin represents at first a positive paternal figure to whom Lenz can turn for peace and guidance. From Lenz's later sharp reluctance

on two occasions (Kaufmann's suggestion, later Oberlin's upon the latter's arrival from Switzerland) to return home there is no doubt that any thoughts concerning his real father triggers negative feelings. Conversely, Oberlin would appear to be a paternal substitute who is, by his function, also closely linked to the Heavenly Father. Oberlin, however, despite his Christian charity and sincere, helpful attitude cannot meet Lenz's needs.

Throughout the novella, but especially after the Kunstgespräch, the conflict between Lenz's inner reality and the external world worsens, and Oberlin is unable to prevent this from happening. Even if one ignores all of Lenz's perturbations between the departure of Oberlin for Switzerland (which produced a devastating effect on Lenz) and his subsequent return, Lenz's hopes for peace through his kind friend are dashed when Oberlin admonishes Lenz to follow his father's wishes and return home. Sobbing and speaking disjointedly (because of emotion, not irrationality), Lenz replies with perhaps his most lucid and honest statement in the novella following the Kunstgespräch and, at the same time, his last, most rational appeal: "Ja, ich halt es aber nicht aus; wollen Sie mich verstossen? Nur in Ihnen ist der Weg zu Gott. Doch mit mir ist's aus! Ich bin abgefallen, verdammt in Ewigkeit, ich bin der Ewige Jude." [p. 94]. In his figurative self-comparison to the Wandering Jew, Lenz rationally expresses his feeling for probably mistaken inner guilt. Lenz believes that not even God (or Christ's redemption) can save him; yet Oberlin suggests this very solution: "Oberlin sagte ihm, dafür sey Jesus gestorben; er möge such brünstig an ihn wenden, und er würde Theil haben an seiner Gnade." [p. 94]. From this point on Oberlin becomes an increasingly negative influence for Lenz, with the possible exception of one instance when Lenz perceives he is welcomed back to Oberlin's with love and friendship. Instead of offering positive support,

Oberlin becomes vexed at Lenz's irrational conversation. When Lenz's condition worsens, Oberlin can no longer provide any tranquility, indeed, to the contrary, accuses him of blasphemy.

Although most Büchner scholars seem to agree that Lenz's intellect exceeds that of Oberlin's, John Parker infers a wiser Oberlin who rather chooses whether or not to participate in conversations with Lenz out of pharisaical or outright malevolent intent:

Yet the same Oberlin, on another occasion, shows Lenz little cakes of paint and explains to him in what relation each colour stands to mankind, and how each apostle can be represented by a colour. Of course Lenz elaborates this in his mind and falls into anxious dreams. The point is that Oberlin, who refuses to talk things out because it 'leads him too far away from his own simple manner', does not hesitate to broach a topic dangerous to Lenz when this suits him. There is in the whole *Novelle* no evidence that Oberlin really discusses Lenz's problems with him. All we read is that Oberlin advises Lenz to turn to God, to pray to Him.<sup>25</sup>

Parker is not far off the mark. Although there can be no question of Oberlin's value to his flock ("In den Hütten war es lebendig, man drängte sich um Oberlin, er wies zurecht, gab Rath, tröstete; überall zutrauensvolle Blicke, Gebet." [p. 82]), one senses, especially from later conversations with Lenz, that there is a formal, letter-of-the-law demeanor from which his preaching emanates. Lenz, on the other hand, in a passage where he and Oberlin are united in religious obligation more closely than at any other point in the novella--Lenz's substitution for Oberlin at the church service--seems much more compassionate and understanding than Oberlin:

Lenz sprach, er war schüchtern, unter den Tönen hatte sein Starrkrampf sich ganz gelegt, sein ganzer Schmerz wachte jetzt auf, und legte sich in sein Herz. Ein süßes Gefühl unendlichen Wohls beschlich ihn. Er sprach einfach mit den Leuten, sie litten alle mit ihm, und es war ihm

ein Trost, wenn er über einige müdgeweinte Augen Schlaf, und gequälten Herzen Ruhe bringen, wenn er über dieses von materiellen Bedürfnissen gequälte Seyn, diese dumpfen Leiden den Himmel leiten konnte.<sup>26</sup>

Parker correctly comments that Oberlin's attitude is dogmatic because he assumes that the truth and religion as revealed to him must be equally acceptable to others. In any case it is certain that notwithstanding several possible intents Büchner may have had in writing Lenz, one plausible reason could have been the condemnation of religion in general as a means of solving man's problems or even of bettering the human condition. Yet Lenz was not sent to Oberlin for religious training but to extend greetings from Kaufmann; and one of the few positive incidents at Oberlin's was the stimulated recall of good memories from the past (and not necessarily tied to the religious element). Benno von Wiese concurs: "Besonders in Oberlins Pfarrhaus findet Lenz inmitten liebevoller Menschen und im erzählenden Sich-Besinnen auf die eigene Vergangenheit ('vergessene Gesichter' und 'alte Lieder') einen beruhigenden Halt. Aber sogleich setzt auch wieder die Gegenbewegung ein."<sup>27</sup>

Ironically Oberlin, a faithful man of the cloth, is mercilessly "crucified" by virtually every literary critic who concerns himself with an interpretation of Lenz. Parker, who finds Oberlin guilty of "dangerous over-simplification," presents a typical view: "...Büchner wants to show that Oberlin's religion and its minister are inadequate [for Lenz]...The judgment which Büchner indirectly passes on Oberlin is all the more valid, as the 'atheist' Büchner is so impartial in his presentation of the situation; he is at pains to show that Oberlin's religion does satisfy the needs of certain people."<sup>28</sup> In an excellent study, the psychologist Francis Sharp takes a different, scientific approach to Oberlin, but roasts

him just the same:

psychiatry has found that even within the most acutely autistic schizophrenic, there remains a vital core of personality which is insulated, but within the reach of skillful therapy. In his literary treatment of Lenz's sojourn with Oberlin, B chner points both to this core of personality in conflict with its pathogenic context and to the particular unsuitability of the man to whom the task of therapy fell.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, Oberlin, the person who means most to Lenz, obviously can also do the most harm to him.

Sporadic dissension through the format of literary criticism has arisen over the question of atheism versus anti-theism as applied to Lenz's attitude toward God. When Benno von Wiese, for example, even equates atheism with nihilism (a much-abused term), he is on dangerous ground. Lenz might be called nihilistic (in a non-political sense), if he conscientiously weighed and rejected certain values. First of all, however, Lenz's increasingly irrational mind, especially at the end, was incapable of a sustained belief in nothing; secondly, what might have outwardly appeared as nihilism was really a reflection of the battle Lenz desperately waged to preserve his inner reality and consciousness. At best Lenz might have seemed to have gone through a brief stage of nihilism between the Kunstgespr ch and total madness in the end.

Those, including Maurice B nn, who adhere to the "atheist" interpretation largely base their opinions on the lines "Lenz musste laut lachen, und mit dem Lachen griff der Atheismus in ihn und fasste ihn ganz sicher und ruhig und fest. Er wusste nicht mehr, was ihn vorhin so bewegt hatte, es fror ihn..." [p. 94]. But only three sentences later B chner writes: "Dann steigerte sich seine Angst, die S nde wider den Heiligen Geist stand vor ihm," affirming that the "firm grasp" of atheism had dissolved on the

very next day, for belief in the Holy Ghost presupposes belief in God. To the extent that Lenz's mind allows (and Lenz is "rational" enough to question the suffering of man as a duty to God), his instinctive anger lashes out against God, taking on anti-theistic proportions. As Hauser puts it:

The cruelty of God's seeming indifference to human suffering is unbearable to Lenz. Yet atheism, the intellectual alternative, shakes the very foundation of his being. He is trapped in an irresolvable conflict. Facing the void of a Godless world is as impossible for him as is blind faith in a God who is capable of inflicting pain and suffering upon His creatures.<sup>30</sup>

Without identifying it as such, Hauser has actually defined Lenz's reaction in terms of anti-theism. This is not to say that Lenz wants to dethrone God or put man in His place, as was the case later with certain nineteenth-century Russian radicals; Lenz desperately questions man's suffering at the hands of an uncaring God. Though not as intense as the dead child episode, there is another passage (once after Oberlin told Lenz to turn to God) in which anti-theism characterizes Lenz's belief when Lenz says that his suffering is caused by the light of God Himself [p. 99].

No discussion of the religious theme in Lenz is complete without treating the scene in which Lenz's last hopes for religious reconciliation are destroyed and he is plunged more quickly toward the abyss, the scene in which Lenz fails in his attempt to resurrect the dead child. The child's name, Friederike, suggests that Lenz in his distorted reality also hoped to save the girl (the historical Friederike Brion) from his past. The failure to awaken the child was so complete that it elicited the response and condition (atheism) discussed above, a response which Benn calls "the mightiest and fiercest outburst of metaphysical revolt in all of Büchner's

writings."<sup>31</sup> Sharp's valid psychological interpretation astutely links the failed attempt with Oberlin:

He [Lenz] believes that he can counteract the menacing sensation of inner deadness and resurrect his own inner life by resurrecting the dead girl. His appeal to the supernatural fails on both counts. He is unable to reproduce the direct link between heaven and earth which he sensed in Oberlin's life. While Lenz's act signifies a blasphemous imitation of Christ, it also reflects an exaggerated conception of Oberlin's powers. The unsuccessful attempt crushes his belief in a divine principle and the resulting atheism brings guilt feelings in its wake...Oberlin's heaven has become an abyss drawing the endangered Lenz deeper into madness.<sup>32</sup>

Not only is Lenz regarded as a realistic forerunner of works in the naturalist and later expressionist periods, but the form of Lenz has also been cited as a prose version of the revolutionary "open" form of drama because of its abrupt beginning and bare trace of exposition.<sup>33</sup> Every scene has its own individual value undistorted by what comes before or after it. Parallel to his technique in choice of vocabulary, there is great economy in the entire novella; nothing unessential is inserted. Büchner was greatly influenced by Shakespeare, who appears as a model in the Kunstgespräch.

Büchner's concentration on the phenomena of the subject is indeed the essence of his realism. Walter Hinck notes:

Doch wird immer wieder das durch Innensicht gelieferte detaillierte Bild von Einbildungen, Zwangsvorstellungen, Ängsten und Visionen als psychologischer Befund in den Bericht eingeordnet...Die Wahnvorstellungen überlagern und zerlösen nicht die Aussenwelt; unsere Ortungskategorien bleiben erhalten.<sup>34</sup>

Though he might have distinguished the types of fears from which Lenz suffers (e.g., Platzangst [p. 92]), Hinck characterizes Büchner's style in depicting Lenz quite well.



When Erwin Kobel wrote that anyone concerning himself with Büchner's works does not know much he should know, does not what emphasis to put on many things, and that from this results the uncertainty with which every interpretation of Büchner is accompanied, he succumbed to the pitfall which some literary critics will encounter when approaching Büchner's Lenz.<sup>35</sup> This novella intentionally has little plot and, indeed, depicts the discontinuity of life in a realistic way. By the same token, Lenz's madness is not sustained at the same level throughout the work (see the charts at the end of this chapter); this lack of uniform intensity is evident if only from the lucid Kunstgespräch. As the charts indicate, Lenz's madness does progress in vacillated stages, but it is also spasmodic.

Certainly a valid question is why Büchner chose to tell the story of a deranged mind. He apparently wanted to examine man in a Grenzsituation, or extreme human condition. Büchner's distortion of reality through madness in Lenz magnifies human problems in general. As Roman Struc puts it: "The premises of Büchner's literary theory are that literature is to lay bare human existence and its realities; it is to explore the ultimate truth about human life."<sup>36</sup> And Lenz's suffering represents a strong, common bond with mankind, a bond which extends to even the lowliest of men--the deranged, criminals (Dostoevsky's protagonists, just as Büchner's, find themselves in a Grenzsituation), and socially unacceptable figures. G. Hauptmann later followed Büchner's lead. The choice of Büchner's protagonist underscores the value and need for this type of bond. According to Hauser:

The disquieting implication is that the whole question of sanity is a nebulous one indeed. Given the mind's limited capacity to recognize reality, who is more in

tune with the real human condition, the so-called well-adjusted man who makes little effort to differentiate between reality and illusion, or the man whose mind cracks under the weight of doubts?<sup>37</sup>

If the reader still has doubts about the personal benefit to be derived from a study on distorted reality, he should heed Büttner's practical outlook:

Die psychologischen Forschungen haben zur Erkenntnis geführt, dass in jedem Einzelmenschen das psychisch Abnorme latent und potentiell angelegt ist. Die allgemeinmenschliche Beschaffenheit ist der Grund für die psychopathischen Abweichungen, d.h., die Psychologie der Neurosen ist im Grunde nichts anderes als die Psychologie des menschlichen Wesens. Neurotische Erscheinungen finden sich auch beim normalen, gesunden und gläubigen Menschen. Seelische Disharmonie und religiöse Nöte und Zweifel können nicht schlechthin als Wahnsinn bezeichnet werden. Der Unglaube gehört von Natur aus zur gefährdeten Beschaffenheit des Menschen.<sup>38</sup>

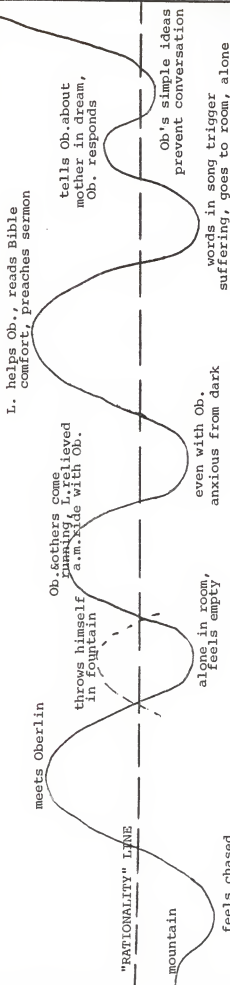
Büttner's commentary necessitates the corollary that one therefore empathizes with Lenz because of the universality of the potential mental demise to which he fell victim.

From the following charts, which are intended to approximate the vacillations in Lenz's rationality, one can easily perceive the high and low points along Lenz's dismal plunge toward total madness. But the charts cannot transmit the intense pain and suffering which Lenz, through Büchner's realistic narrative, not only bore, but bore in isolation. Pain is a confirmation of existence for Lenz, an attempt on the part of his inner reality to establish contact with the distorted reality of the external world. Interestingly (and also graphed in short, non-horizontal broken lines on the charts), Lenz twice attempts this physical contact through water, which may symbolize his desire for the cleansing of his

mental torment and also baptism (if not religious forgiveness, at least renewal of consciousness). It should also be noted that at least for much of the novella, Lenz's positive peaks quite often coincide with human companionship or association, which in turn tends to emphasize the alternate negative theme of isolation.

CHART ONE

Kunstgespräch



Kunstgespräch

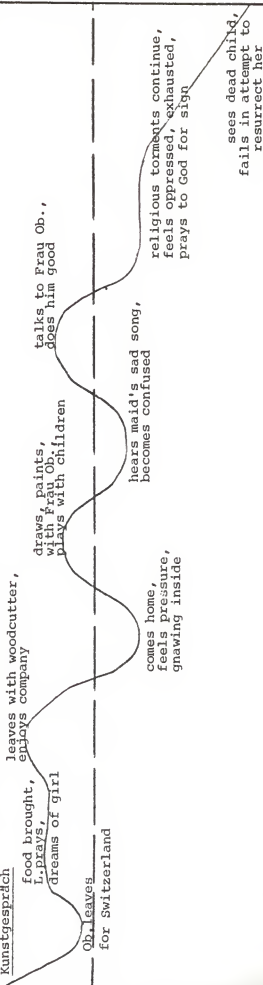


CHART TWO

# CHART THREE

L's inner reality - sensation of cold water, pain = attempt to establish contact with positive exist.  
 rid inner torment visits child's grave, with schoolmaster walks home quickly, afraid, even with companion  
 runs through courtyard, throws himself into fountain; irrational conversations with Ob., Ob. vexed  
 feels he has murdered mother and girl  
 perceives he is welcomed back to Ob.'s, prays all night  
 feels companion is oppressive, runs away  
 L.'s condition worsens, Ob. no longer provides any tranquility  
 temporary control by recit. poetry  
 seized with terror

even day attacks start, these more terrible

Oberlin's words bring Lenz to himself again

abyss of incurable madness that would last for eternity  
 L.theorizes what he would do if he were God, Ob.calls this a profanation  
 seems rational, but tells Ob.,cries prevent sleep  
 makes several half-serious attempts at suicide

feels dreadful void inside no anxiety, no desire

# CHART FOUR

## Woyzeck

The great success which Lenz has enjoyed has by no means overshadowed the significance and impact of Georg Büchner's other major dramatic account of human suffering, Woyzeck. Literary accolades for Woyzeck are justifiably quite numerous, but a few, typical examples will illustrate the extent to which critics have paid homage to one of the great works of German literature. Benn writes: "It can be asserted without hesitation or qualification that Woyzeck has had more influence on modern German drama than any other play of the nineteenth century. It has fascinated dramatists of the most diverse schools and styles--Naturalism, Impressionism, Expressionism, Epic Drama,--traces of influence on Hauptmann, Wedekind, Toller, Horatio, Walser, Frisch, and Brecht, who '...regarded Woyzeck as the beginning of the modern theater.'" <sup>39</sup> Majut notes that among Büchner's works, Woyzeck most completely marks the first appearance of realism. <sup>40</sup> Other critics comment, "No dramatist since Shakespeare has used the episodic form of drama with greater skill and effectiveness than Büchner does in Woyzeck" <sup>41</sup>; "Seit altersher fordern Poetiken und sehen Dramatiker ihre Aufgabe darin, die 'Natur' nachzubilden. Aber noch nie ist der Begriff der (menschlichen) Natur so ausschliesslich aus sich selbst verstanden worden wie im Woyzeck." <sup>42</sup> Even in comparison with Lenz, some scholars view Woyzeck as Büchner's best work. Benn calls Woyzeck "the culmination of Büchner's dramatic career," <sup>43</sup> and Büttner adds, "Sein letztes Werk, das Dramenfragment Woyzeck, ist gerade sein grösstes und originellstes." <sup>44</sup>

One problem concerning Woyzeck which still causes considerable controversy is the order of scenes in this fragmented drama. Since, however, the main concern of this study is not the investigation of scene sequence, Werner Lehmann's exhaustive, logical interpretation will be accepted as correct. The Lehmann edition is based upon thorough research of the two Clarus reports and upon other historical documents and is now considered to be the standard by nearly all Büchner scholars. First published in 1879 under the title Wozzeck, the Franzos edition was considered authoritative (Alban Berg's opera was based on this edition) until the Witkowski and Bergemann editions in the early 1920's, which were in turn supplanted by the scholarly 1967 edition by Werner Lehmann. Despite the dispute over the order of the almost thirty brief scenes (yet most stagings of the play need only about forty minutes), Büchner transmits a powerful mood through the technique of creating autonomous segments, some of which enhance, others of which provide color for the other scenes. Reasonable evidence also indicates that despite some confusion about the order of scenes, Büchner himself considered his play almost completed. Based on Büchner's last letter (Zürich, 1837) to his fiancée, in which he writes: "[ich werde] in längsten acht Tagen Leonce und Lena mit noch zwei anderen Dramen erscheinen lassen,"<sup>45</sup> Michael Patterson, who believes that Büchner's order of scenes follows a perfectly coherent chronology, concludes:

Given that these 'two other dramas' can only be the non-extant Pietro Aretino and Woyzeck, it is virtually certain that Büchner's final intentions regarding Woyzeck were clear enough to allow him to complete the play within a matter of days. In this case, one may reasonably argue that, in as carefully written a piece as this, Büchner would have tidied up any contradictions that still remained.<sup>46</sup>

To parallel the approach taken in the previous section on Lenz, the

present study will first consider the mental condition of the main character Woyzeck. As discussed above, there is no question of the mental instability and affliction which Lenz experiences; but in the case of Woyzeck, the degree to which reality has been distorted becomes considerably more complex. Some critics attach greater importance to the historical models upon which Büchner based his works. Treating the historical Lenz and Woyzeck, Ingeborg Baumgartner writes: "It seems that in Lenz's case mental illness appeared to be a given fact; in Woyzeck's case it remained a matter of conjecture.... Both Lenz and Woyzeck suffered increasing alienation from their fellow man and from their surroundings...."<sup>47</sup>

The act of murder certainly cannot be considered rational, but Woyzeck is "driven" (just as surely as was Lenz) by his own human nature to commit such a heinous crime. The earlier image of Woyzeck which Büchner conveys, i.e., prior to the jealous dance scenes, indicates an inarticulate, gentle soul who, despite his supposedly having no morals or virtue, casts a benevolent, virtuous shadow indeed. This image makes the sharp contrast of murderer Woyzeck all the more blatant, as he is reduced to his natural drives as surely as the trained horse in the carnival scene. Hauser also correctly observes that the fact that Woyzeck kills has deeply tragic implications for mankind.<sup>48</sup>

Although the case is not as strong as with Lenz, there are, to be sure, lines in Woyzeck which portray hallucinatory incidents stemming from superstition and/or a possible mental disturbance on the part of the protagonist. For example, already in an early scene Woyzeck tells Andres, "Still! Es geht was!...Es geht hinter mir, unter mir...hohl, hörst du? Alles hohl da unten! Die Freimaurer!"<sup>49</sup> Scene thirteen (H 4, 13) is only one example containing hallucinatory portents of Woyzeck's crime: "Es redt



immer: stich! stich! und zieht mir zwischen d. Augen wie ein Messer."<sup>50</sup>

The first example (scene two) also recalls a Büchner motif which has been discussed in the Lenz section above--that of the dark, subterranean element. It is significant that except for the murder itself and its subsequent effect, probably the most extreme mental state which Woyzeck experiences occurs with the repetition of "immer zu! immer zu!" [p. 383] (which parallels "stich! stich!") by subterranean voices; Benno von Wiese ties this element to what he calls "Urangst," a basic fear concerning human existence. Yet, for all its psychological implications, Woyzeck's hearing of voices (at least in the second example) may also be viewed merely as the product of increasing emotional stress, resulting from Marie's betrayal and Woyzeck's consequent jealousy and anger toward the Drum Major. Woyzeck, then, is probably a normal, but very suppressed, humiliated person who, owing to his basic goodness (serving as a guinea pig for the doctor's experiment in order to support Marie and the child), is driven by the loss of (and tragic deception by) his most cherished thing in life to commit the irrational but understandable act of murder.

The character Woyzeck has been interpreted by virtually all critics as basically a poor, downtrodden figure with no hope of ever bettering his social status. But it is from this point on, that is, the explication of Woyzeck's function, that opinion begins to diverge. Before expounding on this divergence, however, a brief synopsis of various views on Woyzeck will not only illuminate some characteristics already considered, but will also indicate the two basic directions which the different appraisals take. Hans Mayer views Woyzeck as the suppressed product of his social environment and a certain victim of class struggle:

Hier erscheinen - und das eben macht die geradezu singuläre Eigenart des Woyzeck-Dramas in der deutschen Literatur

aus - die Redenden und Handelnden durchaus gebunden durch ihre Funktionen und Stellungen in der gesellschaftlichen Hierarchie; ihre Moral ist eine solche bestimmter sozialer Gruppen; ihr Denken bestimmt durch ihr gesellschaftliches Sein; ihre Beziehungslosigkeit enthüllt die Unüberbrückbarkeit getrennter sozialer Gruppen, herrschender und unterdrückter...Im Woyzeck geht es nicht nur um Sein und Denken, sondern um die Sichtbarmachung seiner Ursachen, die in den sozialen Lebensbedingungen zu finden sind.<sup>51</sup>

The Soviet critic E. Turaeva goes even farther with her Marxist interpretation, remarking that not only is Woyzeck a character formed under the influence of historical conditions, but that Büchner in Woyzeck is sketching the origin of class antagonism.<sup>52</sup> Robert Mühler sees in Woyzeck a disturbed and spiritually sick person who must live helplessly in an endless, senseless void. His crime of murder stemmed from doubt concerning emptiness: "Sein Wesen gehöre wie jenes von Lenz, Leonce und Danton in den Bereich der Psychose oder Schizophrenie. Der einfache, schlichte Mann aus dem Volk schaut demnach das Nichts gleich wie ein existentieller Philosoph und ist zugleich ein Verrückter."<sup>53</sup> In an often-quoted passage, Kurt May describes Woyzeck as

ein kleiner Mann mit einem grossen Herzen. Und nur dadurch ist er in der Dichtung lebendig geblieben. Es ist gerade seine Armut an Geist und Besitz, die den Reichtum seines grossen und reinen Gefühls aufleuchten lässt. Noch als Mörder ist er ein Mensch in der Unbedingtheit seines liebend hassenden Gefühls. Für ihn gilt dieselbe Devise, wie für so viele Kleistische Menschen: Alles oder Nichts.<sup>54</sup>

Ludwig Büttner astutely observes that H. J. Knight, like May, does not follow the nihilistic and psychoanalytic attempts to interpret meaning. Knight views Woyzeck as a common man who thinks reasonable and honestly, is morally sensitive, and is credible in a natural way which is responsive to public sentiment: "Er sei arbeitswillig und sparsam, voll Gemüt und

Zuneigung, opferbereit und demutsvoll, aber nicht knechtisch und ehrlos gesinnt. Er sei kein Schwächling und Weichling wie die Gestalten im naturalistischen Drama. Die Beweisführung *Knights* wirkt unpathetisch, verständlich und einleuchtend."<sup>55</sup> Horst Oppel likewise thoroughly repudiates the "exaggerated social interpretation" [p. 57]. Diametrically opposed to such views as those espoused by the Soviet critic, Oppel believes the social conflicts in *Woyzeck* are "only in the limelight, which in the course of the drama itself becomes exposed more and more as deception."<sup>56</sup> Marx just rolled over!

Undoubtedly the primary source for many years and still absolutely essential today for Büchner scholarship is the interpretation of *Woyzeck* by Karl Viëtor. The vast majority of critics of *Woyzeck*, including those just cited above, appear to be essentially influenced by Viëtor's interpretation, whether they support or refute his view. Ludwig Büttner is correct in placing great emphasis on Viëtor's view that *Woyzeck* is a defenseless creature unconditionally subjugated to compulsion and hopelessly surrendered by that compulsion to the clinches of a merciless fate.<sup>57</sup> Yet Viëtor also concedes that there are a few passages in which *Woyzeck*'s language exceeds *Woyzeck*'s ability to think and to express himself.<sup>58</sup>

Minor characters in *Woyzeck* only serve to support the major characters, *Woyzeck* and Marie. As in *Lenz*, Büchner concentrates his efforts on the protagonists. In *Woyzeck*, however, the author employs caricature and satire for some minor characters, such as the Doctor and the Captain, not to criticize them as individuals, but to indict their method of performing their duties, according to Maurice Benn, who believes that Büchner's picture of the Captain and Doctor "is perhaps the most powerful piece of satirical portraiture that German literature has produced in the last two centuries."<sup>59</sup>

In his excellent book on caricature and satire in Büchner's works, Henry Schmidt illuminates the function of caricature in this way: "Caricature may transcend the work of art in which it exists by alluding to external reality, or caricature may itself become a work of art, existing as an object of aesthetic value and universal significance."<sup>60</sup> Schmidt terms the carnival scenes "symbolic caricature in reverse," where the satiric technique of debasing a man to resemble an animal is made more ironically ambivalent by transforming an animal to look like a man.<sup>61</sup> The caricature assumes an even greater significance in that Büchner anticipates the carnival earlier in the drama through the heightened effect of Woyzeck's mention of it to the child.

To a much lesser extent than the sharp anti-theistic pronouncements of Lenz, Büchner infers an anti-religious element in Woyzeck. One can only speculate what Büchner might have inserted had Woyzeck's crime occurred in the middle of the drama. Franz Mautner observes that Woyzeck utters no words against God or government.<sup>62</sup> But it is also evident that religious beliefs did not sustain Woyzeck: "Im Horizont der Volksdichtungen bleiben auch Zeichen naiver Frömmigkeit wie Woyzecks Verhältnis zu den Devotionalien: ,Ich hab auch noch ein Heiligen, zwei Herze und schön Gold - es lag in meiner Mutter Bibel, und da steht: Herr! wie dein Leib war rot und wund,/ So lass mein Herz sein aller Stund.'"<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, when Woyzeck says that morality is a luxury of the upper class, he is implying (with morality) religious or any metaphysical thought. Social (rather than metaphysical) truth is stressed in Woyzeck.

Stylistically, Woyzeck follows the pattern of Lenz with conspicuous economy of plot and the omission or reduction of subordinate elements; Benn stresses the use of interspersed folksongs to enhance simplicity, and notes

that many critics call Woyzeck a "dramatic ballad" or "balladesque drama."<sup>64</sup> The most significant symbol in the drama, according to John McCarthy, is the mill wheel, which denotes the mechanical, repetitive element of human nature itself.<sup>65</sup> Although some aspects of Büchner's characterization have already been discussed, it is interesting to note that in Lenz (Friederike, girl from past/dead child, guilt over mother) as well as Woyzeck (Marie, poor girl in Grandmother's tale), women have had a strongly negative influence on the protagonists.

Similar to the debate over the function of the Kunstgespräch, the major dispute concerning Woyzeck appears to be whether or not the drama is a political model for revolt against the ruling class. Bo Ullman has addressed this topic in considerable detail.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps Michael Hamburger gives the best assessment:

Wir können bestimmt sagen, dass Woyzeck ein guter Mensch, wenngleich primitiv und unausgeglichen ist und dass die Gesellschaft - wie sie durch den Hauptmann, den Doktor und den Polizisten vertreten wird - nicht der kollektive Bösewicht des Stückes ist, wie uns verschiedene Literaturhistoriker weismachen wollen ...Das Leiden ist der Bösewicht im Woyzeck und die Gesellschaft ist eines seiner Instrumente.<sup>67</sup>

Georg Büchner's depiction of true life through Woyzeck, with its kaleidoscopic series of short scenes (which Hinck views as possibly derived from Goethe's style in Götz von Berlichingen and most influential on Brecht's Baal<sup>68</sup>), constitutes a practical application of the principles on art set forth in the Kunstgespräch in Lenz. Nature, in particular human nature as a common bond in man, conveys reality. Basic drives, or impulses, become especially apparent in Woyzeck and Marie. Stress, lust, and jealousy befall these protagonists as Büchner reflects life as it really exists in all its possibilities, therefore implying no need to ask

whether it is beautiful or ugly.

The character Woyzeck, obviously a dramatic counterpart to Lenz, experiences the absurd, irrational side of life when he loses Marie to the Drum Major. Marie and Woyzeck's army friend Andres represent the only real contact Woyzeck has with the world. All other characters are either caricatures or insignificant beings. Especially with such initial blind faith in Marie, Woyzeck becomes completely devastated when his idealistic and romantic illusions of a binding relationship with her are shattered. Woyzeck's intense suffering and final act of revenge attest to the unsuitability of man for the world as it exists. Conversely, as Cowen puts it: "Woyzeck appears as the conscience of the world and represents a test for the world and its morality."<sup>69</sup> The world fails!

One important factor which is often overlooked or misinterpreted is the weak condition of Woyzeck's health. The Doctor holds Woyzeck to his peas-only diet for a significantly long period. This point is compounded when the physical duties of a common, enlisted soldier are considered. To the charge that Woyzeck was only the Doctor's volunteer and that he actually submitted himself to this hardship (and subsequent humiliation in front of the students), one need only cite the humanitarian use (the support of Marie and the child) which Woyzeck makes of the small wages. It is further probable that he would engage in any similar work which he felt was necessitated by his moral obligation. Woyzeck's distorted reality, augmented by jealousy and the desire for revenge, culminates in the murder of Marie, which marks the tragic destruction of any hope for or purpose toward meaningful human existence.

## Conclusion

Through the compulsions of Lenz and Woyzeck, Georg Büchner both depicts the tragic results of distorted reality for the protagonists and implies the reality of an equally intense Grenzsituation for anyone who confronts the extreme human conditions which mankind shares. It is probably better to say that Lenz was driven to madness and Woyzeck to crime, although both were ultimately victims of human misunderstanding, lack of compassion, and rejection. Just as Dostoevsky later tries "to find man in man," Büchner lays bare the realities of human existence. And, unfortunately but realistically, the true situation of mankind is rather disheartening. As a result, the reader of Lenz and Woyzeck will probably deduce that man invents his own reality, and the world is perhaps not as he thinks it is.

Majut and McCarthy are wrong to emphasize boredom as a significant element in Büchner's works, at least in regard to the two works in question. Majut even credits boredom with being a motivating force. Although man may indeed be powerless to alter his course, the inconsequentiality of his relentless existence should not be confused with boredom.

If it is true that the line between insanity and genius is a thin one, the application of such a truth would fit Lenz much better than Woyzeck. Lenz, despite his aberrant behavior and the corresponding vacillations illustrated on the charts (pp. 27-28) in this study, is obviously of a higher intellect than Woyzeck (and perhaps for this reason Lenz is able

to plunge more quickly and deeply into the abyss of madness). A Kunstgespräch would have been impossible for Woyzeck, whose limited intellect and social gulf even the learned but caricatured Doctor would not have probed. The closest counterpart that Woyzeck might offer would be the carnival scene with its elevated satire. But the theory in Lenz that "the finer the intellectual sense of man, the duller the sense of the elemental" most definitely applies to Woyzeck who, though certainly no fool, does not possess fine intellect and is certainly so elemental that his natural, irresistible drives help bring about his ruin.

There is another scene which is functionally close to the carnival satire (satire is always negative), in which the Captain says:

Mir wird ganz schwindlig vor den Menschen, wie schnell,  
der lange Schlingel greift aus, es läuft er wie d.  
Schatten von einem Spinnbein, und der Kurze, das zuck-  
elt. Der Lange ist der Blitz u. der Kleine d. Donner.  
Haha...Grotesk! grotesk! [p. 375]

As Wolfgang Kayser notes, every word the Captain uses to describe the scene hits home, and with each he further estranges the world of man by introducing that of animals as well as the neutral ("it swerves"), atmospheric, and extrahuman sphere.<sup>70</sup>

For both Lenz and Woyzeck isolation becomes a significant factor. In Lenz's case, obviously his mental aberrations make him unique, and his suffering and hopelessness reinforce his isolation. Woyzeck, who is mostly found among his social and supposedly more intellectual superiors, is isolated even from morality, which is reserved for noble men; in reality, of course, Woyzeck has higher morals (final act of murder excluded!) than his insensitive superiors, but he believes he can have no morals due to his low social rank.



A sub-theme of isolation which Büchner employs is abandonment. Both the father and mother figures are prominent as possible underlying causes for Lenz's insanity. For Woyzeck this sub-theme occurs at the very end as he comes into court; like the poor child in the Grandmother's fairy tale, which is a perfect allegory of Woyzeck, he has no father, no mother, and is completely alone.

Several Büchner scholars have commented on the similarity of technique found in Lenz and Woyzeck. Ronald Hauser's remarks are representative:

With Woyzeck, Büchner created the theatrical counterpart of the unique narrative perspective he had developed in Lenz. All interest is focused upon the 'hero,' and the audience is never allowed to ponder the fate of the other characters, who are figures only to the extent that their actions and words affect Woyzeck. With unmatched relentlessness, the viewer is forced into confrontation after confrontation with the one man and his struggles to live despite his unfitness for life.<sup>71</sup>

In a letter of March 10, 1834 to his fiancée, Büchner posed the question: "Was ist das, was in uns lügt, mordet, stiehlt?"<sup>72</sup> From Lenz and Woyzeck one might deduce the answer: man's inescapable nature, which is so powerful that it may overcome all rational thought. All that Büchner demanded of art was that it be life, and that it might exist, whether beautiful or ugly. Büchner's realism implies a corollary which equally applies as the only solution to the extreme and unbearable conditions which brought about distorted realities in Lenz and Woyzeck: True life ends in death, for Lenz a mental, intellectual death, for Woyzeck the judgment resulting from his murder of Marie.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Biographical data is taken from J. P. Stern's Re-Interpretations: Seven Studies in Nineteenth-Century German Literature (New York: Basic Books, 1964), and from K. Vištor's and D. Richards' studies mentioned below.

<sup>2</sup>Maurice Benn in his The Drama of Revolt: A Critical Study of Georg Büchner (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1976) writes: "It may be true ...that in the 'Titan's Song' there is a reminiscence of Goethe's 'Prometheus'; but even in that passionate hymn of the young Goethe there is hardly such a force of rebellious anger and hatred as we have here." (p. 209).

<sup>3</sup>Ronald Hauser, Georg Büchner (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 49.

<sup>4</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup>Roy Cowen, "Identity and Conscience in Büchner's Works," The Germanic Review, 53 (1968), 265.

<sup>6</sup>John Parker, "Some Reflections on Georg Büchner's Lenz and Its Principal Source, The Oberlin Record," German Life and Letters, 21 (1968), 107.

<sup>7</sup>William Reeve, Georg Büchner (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1979), p. 34.

<sup>8</sup>Georg Büchner, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Werner R. Lehmann (München: Christian Hanser Verlag, 1979), p. 80.

<sup>9</sup>Ludwig Büttner, Büchners Bild vom Menschen (Nürnberg: Hans Carl Verlag, 1967), p. 43.

<sup>10</sup>Walter Hinck, Georg Büchner (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1969), p. 266.

<sup>11</sup>The name itself has a meaning; "raskol'" in Russian means "schism" or "split."

<sup>12</sup>Works such as Maurice Benn's The Drama of Revolt do not belong here, despite perhaps misleading or even sensationalist titles. Benn applies the term revolt in general against German classicism.

<sup>13</sup>Janet King, "Lenz Viewed Sane," The Germanic Review, 49 (1974), 146.

<sup>14</sup>Janet King, p. 147.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Jansen, "The Structural Function of the Kunstgespräch in Büchner's Lenz," Monatshefte, 67 (1975), 146.

<sup>16</sup>Peter Jansen, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup>Peter Jansen, p. 147.

<sup>18</sup>Ronald Hauser, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup>Walter Hinck, p. 266.

<sup>20</sup>Peter Hasubek in his article "'Ruhe' und 'Bewegung': Versuch einer Stilanalyse von Georg Büchners Lenz," Germanische-romanische Monatsschrift, 19 (1969), 33-59, examines stylistic differences in Lenz's speech, contrasting the Kunstgespräch with the rest of the novella.

<sup>21</sup>John Parker, p. 107.

<sup>22</sup>Erwin Kobel, Georg Büchner: Das dichterische Werk (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>Hans Mayer, Georg Büchner und Seine Zeit (Frankfurt am M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), p. 288.

- <sup>24</sup>Dieter Sevin, "Die existentielle Krise in Büchners Lenz," Seminar, 15 (1979), 22.
- <sup>25</sup>John Parker, p. 108.
- <sup>26</sup>Georg Büchner, p. 84.
- <sup>27</sup>Benno von Wiese, "Georg Büchner, 'Lenz'," Die deutsche Novelle von Goethe bis Kafka: Interpretationen, 2 (Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1965), 113.
- <sup>28</sup>John Parker, p. 109.
- <sup>29</sup>Francis Sharp, "Büchner's Lenz: A Futile Madness," Psychoanalytische und Psychopathologische Literaturinterpretationen, 10 (1981), 267.
- <sup>30</sup>Ronald Hauser, p. 68.
- <sup>31</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 209.
- <sup>32</sup>Francis Sharp, p. 273.
- <sup>33</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 194.
- <sup>34</sup>Walter Hinck, p. 265.
- <sup>35</sup>Erwin Kobel, p. 3.
- <sup>36</sup>Roman Struc, "Madness as Existence: An Essay on a Literary Theme," Research Studies, 38 (1970), No. 2, 82.
- <sup>37</sup>Ronald Hauser, p. 71.
- <sup>38</sup>Ludwig Büttner, p. 49.
- <sup>39</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 263.
- <sup>40</sup>Rudolf Majut, "Studien um Büchner: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der problematischen Natur," Germanische Studien, 121 (1932), 65.
- <sup>41</sup>David G. Richards, Georg Büchner and the Birth of Modern Drama (Albany: State Univ. of N. Y. Press, 1977), p. 190.
- <sup>42</sup>Walter Hinck, p. 271.
- <sup>43</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 217.

<sup>44</sup>Ludwig Büttner, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup>Georg Büchner, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Werner R. Lehmann (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1967), p. 464.

<sup>46</sup>Michael Patterson, "Contradictions Concerning Time in Büchner's Woyzeck," German Life and Letters, 32 (1978/79), 115.

<sup>47</sup>Ingeborg Baumgartner, "Ambiguity in Büchner's Woyzeck," Michigan Germanic Studies, 1 (1975), 201. Baumgartner also stresses that research on the historical figure Woyzeck as an aid to interpreting the drama has been overlooked, noting that in a significant departure from the historical source, Büchner has Woyzeck come in contact with the Doctor before Woyzeck commits the crime, whereas the historical Woyzeck comes under the Doctor's care only after his arrest.

<sup>48</sup>Ronald Hauser, p. 106.

<sup>49</sup>Georg Büchner, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, ed. Werner R. Lehman (München: Christian Hanser Verlag, 1979), p. 338.

<sup>50</sup>Georg Büchner, p. 382.

<sup>51</sup>Hans Mayer, p. 342.

<sup>52</sup>О. Я. Тураева, "К вопросу о реализме Бюхнера," Научные доклады высшей школы. Филологические науки, 3 (1961), 153.

<sup>53</sup>Ludwig Büttner, p. 55.

<sup>54</sup>Benno von Wiese (ed.), Das deutsche Drama. II, 94.

<sup>55</sup>Ludwig Büttner, p. 56.

<sup>56</sup>Ludwig Büttner, p. 57.

<sup>57</sup>Ludwig Büttner, p. 56.

<sup>58</sup>Karl Vištor, Georg Büchner: Politik, Dichtung, Wissenschaft (Berne: Francke Verlag, 1949), p. 193.

<sup>59</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 240.

<sup>60</sup>Henry Schmidt, Satire, Caricature and Perspectivism in the Works of Georg Büchner (The Hague: Mouton, 1970), p. 12.

<sup>61</sup>Henry Schmidt, p. 52.

<sup>62</sup>Franz Mautner, "Wortgewebe, Sinnefüge und 'Idee' in Büchners Woyzeck," Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift, 35 (1961), 529.

<sup>63</sup>Walter Hinck, p. 273.

<sup>64</sup>Maurice Benn, p. 231.

<sup>65</sup>John McCarthy, "Some Aspects of Imagery in Büchner's Woyzeck," Modern Language Notes, 91 (1976), 544.

<sup>66</sup>One illuminating work on this topic is Bo Ullman's "Der unpolitische Georg Büchner," Stockholm Studies in Modern Philology, 4 (1972), 86-130.

<sup>67</sup>Michael Hamburger, Vernunft und Rebellion: Aufsätze zur Gesellschaftskritik in der deutschen Literatur (München: Carl Hauser Verlag, 1969), p. 98.

<sup>68</sup>Walter Hinck, p. 272.

<sup>69</sup>Roy Cowen, p. 264.

<sup>70</sup>Wolfgang Kayser, "'Grotesk! grotesk!' - Büchners Woyzeck," in Das Groteske: Seine Darstellung in Malerei und Dichtung (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1960), p. 74.

<sup>71</sup>Ronald Hauser, p. 108.

<sup>72</sup>Georg Büchner, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe, (Hamburg: Christian Wegner Verlag, 1971), p. 426.

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# The Distortion of Reality through Madness

in Georg Büchner's Lenz and Woyzeck

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## Abstract

As scholarship on Georg Büchner continues to increase in both volume and scope, the significance of his monumental literary contributions becomes overwhelmingly evident. Büchner's few but precursory works, especially Lenz and Woyzeck, not only heavily influenced literary movements and their representatives ranging from Hauptmann to Brecht, but will undoubtedly influence future trends as well.

The intent of this study is to examine the ways in which reality has been distorted through madness in Büchner's narrative Lenz and drama Woyzeck. Both of these works depict irrationality resulting from extreme human conditions. The forms, frequency, and intensity of madness differ sharply in the two works. For Lenz, where madness is a major factor throughout the work, the mental aberrations of the protagonist have been plotted graphically. Woyzeck does not contain the constant, sustained vacillations of mental disturbance, but represents no lesser degree of irrational intensity through the act of murder. The problematic concerns inherent in any work which attempts to define or evaluate reality are readily conceded.

A diagnosis of Lenz's madness would indicate that the character suffers from severe depression and feelings of guilt, both of which derive from his belief that he somehow destroyed his mother and a

certain girl, perhaps a former girl friend. It is also evident that Lenz has an extremely negative attitude toward his father and God (a father figure). But it should be stressed that Lenz is much more a literary masterpiece than a clinical study. Through the skillful portrayal of Lenz's inner thought processes, Büchner unquestionably can be considered a forerunner of the later psychological novels of Dostoevsky and Kafka.

Lenz suffers intolerable mental stress to the point of committing bizarre acts that are comprehensible only in light of his own inner reality. His unsuccessful attempt to resurrect the dead girl illustrates not only the depth and innateness of his religious beliefs, but also his utter dependence on them and subsequent disillusionment en route to his downfall. Although the Kunstgespräch in Lenz is not thematically supported in terms of the main idea of the work (a young man's battle against madness), it clearly reflects both the peak of Lenz's rationality and Büchner's concern about the idealistic distortion of reality in art. Pain functions in the work as a confirmation of existence for Lenz, as an attempt on the part of his inner reality to establish contact with the distorted reality of the external world.

Woyzeck, considered by many to be Büchner's best work, concerns an inarticulate, gentle character who is driven by jealousy and anger to commit the irrational and yet understandable act of murder. Though the drama abounds in social antagonisms, some scholars are in error when they interpret Woyzeck as a call to revolt.

Through the compulsions of Lenz and Woyzeck Büchner both depicts the tragic results of distorted reality for the protagonists and implies the reality of an equally intense Grenzsituation. In Lenz and

Woyzeck Büchner has portrayed realistically man's nature as inescapable and so powerful that it may overcome all rational thought.